

kind he would think it the most *reasonable and probable* the Almighty should bestow, he would most likely answer both questions, by saying, Such a revelation as should provide some infallible guide on earth, readily accessible to every man, so that no man could possibly be in any doubt as to the divine will on any point, but that each would be placed on a kind of plain road, which he would only have to follow steadily, without taking any care to look about him; "for," he might say, "if a book is put into my hands containing a divine revelation, but containing passages which different persons may understand differently, and also containing no directions as to some points of belief and of conduct, unless I have some infallible interpreter always at hand, to give me the right meaning of every passage, and supply all deficiencies, this revelation is no revelation to me. The book itself, indeed, may be free from all admixture of error; but it is no guide to me, unless I can be perfectly certain, in every case, what its directions are. It is in vain to tell me that the pole star is always fixed in the north; I cannot steer my course by it when it is obscured by clouds, so that I cannot be sure where it is; I must have a *compass* to steer by, which I can consult at all times."

And for a man thus to give himself up to the guidance of a supposed infallible church, or leader, without venturing thenceforth to exercise his own judgment—this he will be apt to regard as the very perfection of pious humility, though it is in truth "leaning to his own understanding;" for to resolve to believe that God *must* have dealt with us just in the way we could *wish*, and in the way that to us seems most *probable*, is to set up ourselves as his judges.

But anything that falls in at once with men's *wishes* and *conjectures*, that they will often readily and firmly believe, not only *without* evidence, but

against evidence. And so it is in this case. The principle I have been speaking of—that if there be a revelation there must be an infallible interpreter of it always at hand—clings so strongly to the minds of very many men, that they are often found still to maintain it after they have ceased to believe in Christianity, or even in the existence of a God. Strange as it may seem to some, to find an agreement on this point between Swedenborgians and sincere Roman Catholics, something still more strange will be found on inquiry. My young friend, if he travels in Italy, Spain and Portugal, and gets into habits of intimacy and confidential private conversation with intelligent men there, will find, as I have been assured on the most competent authority, that a very large majority of the most thoughtful and best-informed men are unbelievers in Christianity. Yet still they hold to the principle, that the idea of a revelation implies that of an infallible interpreter accessible to all. Indeed, it is this very principle that has *made* them infidels. Having satisfied themselves by examination and reflection that there is no such interpreter (a conclusion which a man of intelligence will hardly fail to arrive at when he *allows himself* to examine and reflect), they conclude at once that there can be no revelation. They seldom think it worth while to inquire into the claims of any other form of Christianity which does not pretend to furnish an infallible interpreter. According to their *view* it is quite idle to talk of a revelation *without* such an interpreter. The notion of the *necessity* of this, to any revelation, in which notion they have been brought up, still clings to them. And while they outwardly profess adherence to their church, in order to keep up among the vulgar what they consider as a salutary awe, the very principle on which that church mainly rests—the alleged "necessity"